



**Testimony of James M. Shannon  
President and CEO  
NFPA  
Before the  
Committee on Science  
United States House of Representatives  
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Chairman Boehlert, Ranking Member Gordon and members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before this Committee today. My name is James M. Shannon, and I am President and Chief Executive Officer of the National Fire Protection Association. NFPA is a non-profit organization; founded more than 100 years ago, with a mission to save lives through scientifically based consensus codes and standards, fire and life safety education and training, and fire research and analysis. NFPA consensus codes and standards are adopted by state and local jurisdictions throughout the United States and widely used by the federal government.

Today NFPA has nearly 300 codes and standards addressing safety, each accredited by the American National Standard Institute (ANSI) and developed by technical experts, the fire service, and others participating as volunteers in a consensus process. This process ensures that all interested parties have a say in developing standards. Congress affirmed its support for voluntary consensus standards in the National Technology Transfer and Advancement Act of 1995 (P.L.104-113) and reaffirmed that support in the Homeland Security Act of 2002, the law that created the new department. Recently, the Department of Homeland Security adopted five NFPA personal protective equipment standards.

As Congress considers the reauthorization of the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program, I wish to testify in support of H.R. 4107. This legislation will codify much of the important work the United States Fire Administration (USFA) has done in administering this crucial grant program since 2001. From day one, USFA has worked with the nation's fire service to ensure that this program is managed in a way that best meets the existing needs.

First, let me state emphatically that the reauthorization of the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program, commonly known as the FIRE Grant program, is extremely important to the effectiveness of the fire service throughout the United States. This program addresses every element of the fire service including fire suppression, prevention, code enforcement, and emergency medical response. In May of 1973 the Chairman of the National Commission on Fire Prevention and Control, Richard E. Bland, transmitted to President Nixon its final report "America Burning." In that report the Commission recommended establishment of the United States Fire Administration to:

- Evaluate the nation's fire problem through data collection and analysis and research,
- Create a National Fire Academy to improve training and education for fire service personnel,
- Strengthen public awareness of the fire threat, and
- Provide grants to state and local governments.

Before Congress wisely created the FIRE Grant Program, USFA was unable to use that final key function with the scale and breadth needed to help America's fire service achieve full effectiveness in its role of protecting the public. Now, with the continuing support of Congress, and with diligent administration by USFA, this program is addressing the needs of the fire service and promoting public safety.

The staff at USFA has done a tremendous job in administering the FIRE Grant Program. Since its creation in FY2001, this program has provided more than \$1 billion in financial resources directly to fire departments.

Nonetheless, fire departments have applied for more than \$7 billion, and the real needs are even greater than this, as I shall discuss. It is crucial that the FIRE Grant Program be maintained as a separate and distinct funding source where fire departments can receive direct funding from the federal government and avoid unnecessary red tape. I would also urge the Congress to fund the program at a level no less than its authorized amount of \$900 million dollars.

When I said the needs are much greater than the currently authorized and appropriated amounts for the FIRE Grant program, I was speaking on the basis of the “Needs Assessment Survey” of the fire service, which was specifically commissioned by Congress as part of the FIRE Act and which was completed just over a year ago by NFPA in cooperation with FEMA/USFA. Let me share with you a few of the major findings from that survey.

- Only one in every 10 fire departments has the local personnel and equipment required to respond effectively to a building collapse or the release of chemical or biological agents with even minimal to moderate casualties;
- 50% of our firefighters involved in "technical rescue" lack formal training, but technical rescue involving unique or complex conditions is precisely the skill they would need to respond to a terrorist attack;
- There are other huge gaps in training – There has been no formal training for 21% of those involved in structural firefighting; for 27% of those involved in EMS work; and for 40% who are sent in to deal with hazardous materials;

- And we don't protect our firefighters as we should. One third of the protective clothing worn by firefighters sent into a burning building is more than 10 years old, and an estimated 57,000 firefighters lack any protective clothing at all;
- On a typical fire department shift, 45% of first responding firefighters lack portable radios; 36% lack self-contained breathing apparatus; and 42% answer an emergency call without a Personal Alert Safety System (PASS) device that is critical in locating an injured or trapped firefighter;
- Finally, at least 65% of cities and towns nationwide don't have enough fire stations to achieve widely recognized response-time guidelines. Those guidelines recommend that firefighters be on the scene of any situation within 4 minutes, 90% of the time.

In the next 2-3 months, NFPA will release a needs assessment on each of the 50 states, based on further analysis of the data collected for the national fire service needs assessment. We fully expect these reports to demonstrate that fire departments in every part of the nation share in the national needs and require the help this grant program has been providing.

The Needs Assessment began before the horrific events of September 11, 2001, but because of the foresight of USFA and our fire service advisors, the survey included extensive attention to terrorism preparedness. When the Council on Foreign Relations began an exercise, under former Senator Warren Rudman, to develop cost estimates of terrorism preparedness for the entire first responder community at all levels of government, the Needs

Assessment permitted NFPA to develop and substantiate the fire service portion of these cost estimates with unusual detail.

In its report released last year, the Council estimated that it would take \$98.4 billion in additional funds above current spending (estimated at \$26-76 billion) over the next 5 years, or \$19.7 billion per year, to meet the needs of our first responders to handle the additional responsibilities of homeland security. The fire service portion of this, based on the Council's use of NFPA's analysis of the Needs Assessment Survey, was \$26.5 billion in initial costs and \$7.1 billion per year in ongoing costs.

Chairman Boehlert, your legislation takes the next, appropriate step, and that is to provide the resources to update the original needs assessment. Now that FIRE Grant Program is in its fourth year, it is important to have empirical data to show how this program is addressing the needs the original study documented. This updated study would measure the impact of the grant program on the shortfalls identified by NFPA's original assessment.

In addition, HR 4107 protects the fire prevention and education portion of the FIRE Grant program. While it is only five percent of the total funding, fire prevention and education activities conducted by our fire departments, educators, and other community leaders address a pressing need. These programs often reach out to high-risk groups who disproportionately die in fires: children, older adults and the disadvantaged. Some disturbing statistics about these groups:

- Children five and younger and adults sixty-five and older have a death rate from fire and burns that is roughly twice the rate of the population as a whole
- These two groups account for over 40% of all civilian fatalities
- Fire risk is highest in rural areas and large urban areas- the same communities where poverty and other high-risk conditions are most widespread

We cannot continue to ask our firefighters to do more with fewer resources. We would not expect the men and women in our armed services to defend our nation without proper training, equipment and staffing. But as the country braces for the unknown at home, our nation's firefighters, who are nearly always the first responders in any crisis, need more help in order to protect our citizenry or themselves.

Fire departments face many difficult decisions. We can no longer ask our fire departments to survive entirely on local tax revenue supplemented by potluck dinners, auctions and fundraisers. The FIRE Grant program is beginning to address the shortfalls, which we know exist.

The federal government must continue to provide adequate resources through the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program and to support our firefighters to meet the many challenges they face every day. Your legislation will help to ensure that this program does just that. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify here today. I am happy to answer any questions you have.